# JAQUES STAUNTON CHESS SETS 1849-1939

*A Collectors Guide*

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## 1. Introduction

By the mid 19th century, the British Empire bestrode the world. For the best part of a hundred years, its merchant seamen had plied the oceans for trade, and the Royal Navy had ruled the waves. Its armies had fought numerous campaigns and occupied its far-flung colonies. The British had been touring the historical sites of the world, bringing home art and historical artifacts. At home, the industrious Victorians were busy in their leisure time and loved games like chess. A British chess player, Howard Staunton, was the unofficial World Champion, having beaten the French champion St. Amant in Paris in 1843. London was a centre for the manufacture of chess sets to satisfy the needs of the large middle class, the sailors and soldiers, and the aristocracy. The carvers in Fleet Street made beautiful wistful looking knights that complemented the tall elegantly turned chessmen in ivory, bone and boxwood and ebony. But, these beautiful sets were spindly on narrow bases, and more rugged sets were needed for match play and the rough and tumble of regular games. One of the thriving wood and ivory turners, John Jaques, had a brilliant idea that would transform the design of chess sets for ever - he would make a set that was beautiful in its functionality, be easy to produce on a large scale and would have rugged pieces on heavy, stable bases that would not easily fall over. Either he or his associate Nathaniel Cook designed the set that was registered by Nathaniel on 1 March 1849. The sturdy turned rooks looked like solid castles with impregnable walls, the pawns were minimalist yet refined with a slim collar, the bishops had simple mitres, the tall elegant king was readily distinguished by its cross, and the queen had a distinctive coronet. The design of the knight was inspired by the horses in the Elgin Marbles from the Athenian Parthenon in the British Museum. Jaques capped the design with an even more brilliant marketing strategy: he named his set the "Staunton Pattern", and used the vanity, influence and arrogance of the chess champion-cum-journalist Howard Staunton to promote the sets unashamedly at the expense of rivals.

The timeless beauty and the utility of the Staunton pattern has made it the set of choice for players and it has been the official standard for tournament play since 1924. The Jaques Staunton is the Rolls Royce of playing sets and is highly prized by collectors both for display and play. What also sets Jaques Staunton apart is that over their long period of production there is documented information about dating the sets and their evolution in design, which makes them a feast for real collectors who are interested in the history of their passion. For the first six or seven years, each set was individually numbered, just like the father of English clock making, Thomas Tompion, had done 150 years earlier for his clocks and watches. Details were periodically published in the Illustrated London News and advertisements in the press and trade journals. All boxes had trade labels that changed in design and denoted key events that can be dated, such as the elevation of Jaques' son to a partnership and the incorporation of the company as "Limited".

I am indebted to: Michael Mark whose scholarly research in scouring the newspapers, trade gazettes and advertising of the period has provided a documented historical basis (which is published in his "British Chess Sets") and for his many personal communications; Robert Stoller for his eagle-eyed analysis of style and helpful comments and careful reading of the manuscript; Alan Dewey for technical information and the encouragement to write; and Jon Crumiller for his generous donation of photographs and insights. Tim Millard, Garrick Coleman, Joost van Reij, Dario Perez and Bonhams Auction House also kindly allowed me to use their excellent photographs or extracts from them. I am indebted to Frank Camaratta for his decades of study of dating and classifying Staunton sets, both published on his website and in personal communications.

I have tried to be as precise as possible in the dating, but there will always be leeway and the dates are not written in stone.

## 2. Labels, registration stickers and history

Nathaniel Cook registered the design on 1 March 1849, which entitled protection against the design being copied by rivals for three years. The diamond-shaped registration ("lozenge") was in the middle of a green sticker, which was stuck under every piece. In a circle at the top of Figure 1 is II, which signifies that the protection was for wood only, and not for ivory which did not have a category. Underneath is an "S", which designates 1849. The "w" on the left is for March, and the "1" at the right is for the first day of the month. The bundle number (which need not concern us) is a misprinted mirror image of 5. The main lozenge illustrated is a late one. Some of the earliest have the S omitted by mistake and the 5 in the correct orientation.

**Figure 1. Victorian registration lozenges.**

The first sets were advertised in The Illustrated London News 29 September 1849.

THE STAUNTON CHESS-MEN.

Registered No. 28,607, 5th and 6th of Victoria, cap. 100.

"We shall be greatly mistaken if, in a short time, these beautiful pieces do not entirely supersede the ungainly, inexpressive ones we have been hitherto contented with."—Illustrated London News, Sept. 8th, 1849.

The Nobility and Gentry are respectfully informed that these new and elegant CHESS-MEN are now obtainable of W. LEUCHARS, 38, PICCADILLY, at the following prices, viz :—

| | £ | s | d |
|---|---|---|---|
| For the Finest African Ivory, with a richly ornamented box of "Carton Pierre," and a New Treatise on the Game, by the Author of "The Chess-player's Handbook" .. .. | 5 | 5 | 0 |
| In Box and Ebony, Large Size for Clubs, with a Solid Mahogany Box and the New Treatise .. .. .. .. | 2 | 5 | 0 |
| In Wedgewood's Carrara, with the Carton Pierre Box and the New Treatise .. .. .. .. .. .. | 2 | 12 | 6 |
| In Box and Ebony, Ordinary Size, with the Carton Pierre Box and the New Treatise .. .. .. .. | 1 | 15 | 0 |

*** To secure the Public against Fraudulent Imitations, each Box has a Label Attached, with the Autograph of the Distinguished Player after whom the Pieces are named.

*The expanded range*

The very rare and expensive large ivory set with a 4.4" tall king was introduced in April 1850. Jaques soon had an expanded range, priced as in Mr Staunton's Treatise, which was included with some sets (Figure 2).

THE STAUNTON CHESSMEN.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| No. | | £ s. d. |
| 600. | Ebony and Boxwood, in Cedar Box. (Base of King, 1¾ in. diameter) | 6 15 0 |
| 66. | Ebony and Boxwood, in Cedar Box. (Base of King, 1¾ in. diameter) | 5 12 0 |
| 1. | Ebony and Boxwood, superior finished, loaded with lead, in Mahogany Case. (Base of King, 1¾ in. diameter) | 4 5 0 |
| *1. | Ebony and Boxwood, in Carton-pierre Casket, including Mr. Staunton's Treatise. Base of King, 1¾ in. diameter) | 3 10 0 |
| 1. | Ebony and Boxwood, loaded with lead, Club size, in strong Mahogany Case, including Treatise. (Base of King, 2 in. diameter) | 3 5 0 |
| 2. | Finest African Ivory, in Carton-pierre Casket. (Base of King, 1¾ in. diameter) | 3 15 0 |
| 4. | Finest African Ivory, in Carton-pierre Casket, richly lined, including Treatise. Base of King, 1¾ in. diameter) | 2 2 0 |
| 5. | Finest African Ivory, Club size, in extra large Carton-pierre Casket, richly lined, with Treatise. (Base of King, 2 in. diameter) | 3 3 0 |
| 6. | Finest African Ivory, Club size, in handsome Spanish Mahogany Case, fitted in Trays with divisions, lined throughout with rich silk velvet. (Base of King, 2 in. diameter) | 12 12 0 |

*Caution.—The Signature of Mr. Staunton is attached to each set of the Chessmen.*

* These may be had loaded with lead, price 5s. per set extra.

**Figure 2. Price list from about 1853-55.**

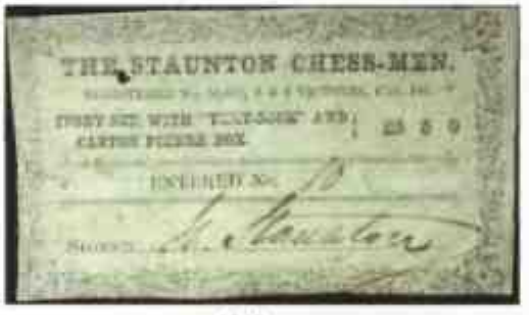
The king in the standard set has a 1 ¾" diameter base, which corresponds to a height of about 3 ½". This is referred to as the 3.5" or tournament set. The smaller 1 3/8" base set corresponds to a king's height of 2 7/8", the "library" set, which was introduced about 1851. The 2" base is for a king's height of 4 3/8", the 4.4" or club size set. Later, after 1855, there are 4" "small club" sets. Although the boxwood sets in the Carton Pierre (black papier mache), illustrated at the top of the page in the Treatise, were normally unweighted, they could be loaded with lead for an extra 5s (25p in decimal currency). Jaques was never a retailer and the sets were sold initially by Leuchars and then by others.

*Labels*

Each of the first series of sets had a white label stuck under the box, personally signed by H. Staunton, the "Distinguished Player" (Figure 3). Staunton also personally numbered each set, up to at least No. 684. The first labels were headed THE STAUNTON CHESS-MEN. The name of Jaques either did not appear on them or is very faint on the left side of the entered number with LONDON on the right, either in a straight line or curved. The label described the contents and price. The Carton Pierre boxes, described later, retained their labels underneath. By the time the 600s had been reached, the label of the mahogany boxes for boxwood and ebony sets had migrated to under the hinged lid, which was fortunate because very few of the ones under mahogany boxes have survived legibly. The labels for these boxwood sets are green, and JAQUES LONDON is at the bottom.

There was a radical change in the colouring and numbering of labels after the personal signing ended in about 1850-51. A facsimile of Staunton's signature was then printed on each label, which is still in use today. The sets had a printed entry number, which was coded along with the colour of the label. Green labels were for wooden sets in mahogany hinge-top boxes with weighted bases, and all began with "1", and formed a series from 1,000 to 1,999. Yellow labels were for Carton Pierre caskets and formed a series

beginning in "2" from 2,000 to 2,999 for the smaller, and usually unweighted, wooden sets. Red labels were the hallmark of ivory sets, and all began with the number "3". The runs of numbered wooden sets probably finished at 2999 by about 1855-56, but the more expensive ivory sets may have continued into the 1860s as they sold much more slowly. The very expensive sets were probably stocked by Jaques and labelled when requested by retailers. The 4.4" ivory set No. 3841 is identical to the earlier 3259, which, judging by style and the presence of registration stickers probably dates to no later than 1852.




1849

1850

1855

1855

1850 (No. 684)

1856-60

1855

**Figure 3. Early labels.** *1849, 1855 and 1856-60 labels are on undersides of Carton Pierre caskets. 1850 label No. 628 is under lid of mahogany box. Nos 10, 628 and 684 from 1850 are hand signed and entered by Staunton. Printed Entered No. labels are yellow for boxwood and ebony, red for ivory in Carton Pierre boxes. No. 684 is the highest hand-signed number seen by the author. Like 2880, "JAQUES LONDON" has been pasted over by a retailer's label. The green labels 628 and 684 are clearly a different batch from the earlier hand-signed ones, with "SIGNED" being changed to "Signed", to accompany the new position inside the mahogany box as well as the change in colour. The price of the ivory set in label No. 10 is printed as £5-5-0, £5.25 in decimal money. No. 2711 has the price written in ink on the right of the Entered No. as 35s, i.e. £1.75. The 1856-60 label has JAQUES LONDON but is post-Entered number. Entered Nos. 10 and 684 photos courtesy of Michael Mark.*

**Figure 4. Jaques and Son labels, post-1862.** *After 1862, the label indicates two prize medals and has Jaques' son as partner. Labels between 1860 and 1862 have the son in partnership. After 1900, Jaques is a Limited (Ltd) company. The green label on bottom left is from under a red sarcophagus containing an ivory set. In the 1930s "GENUINE" and in the 1940s "ORIGINAL" is added above "Staunton Chessmen". Photo of the 1930-39 label is courtesy of Joost van Reij.*

The numbering then stopped, as in the 1856-1860 label, but the colours were retained until about 1862. In 1860, son John was taken into partnership and the labels changed to JAQUES & SON, LONDON. In 1862, Jaques won two prize medals for the quality and finish of their billiard balls and ivory chess sets. From 1862 to 1900, all labels bore the announcement: Two Prize Medals Awarded, 1862, even for the wooden sets! During this period, the red labels were still used for ivory sets but green was adopted for all wooden sets. Labels from 1862 to about 1880 have a border of interlinked curves. Then a geometric motif was used, with stars in each corner in a square. The hyphen was also dropped from "CHESS-MEN". In 1900, the company became Limited one under British law, and the labels from then on bear: J.JAQUES AND SON, LTD., LONDON, ENGLAND. Green labels were also sometimes used for ivory sets in the twentieth century.

Of the labels illustrated, No. 10 is the third oldest known and the set is in the British Museum. The Carton Pierre labels have often survived remarkably well. Two labels are interesting because retailers have obliterated the Jaques name with their own. No. 2880 has a Pearce's sticker, and the king is unsigned. No. 684 has a Leuchars' sticker. The king is signed in this set, but in another Leuchars' retailed ivory set, "Jaques" has been erased from under the king and "Leuchars" substituted. The wording of the labels gradually changed throughout the 20th century, as can be seen. "Genuine" was added in the 1930s and "Original" in the 1940s.

## 3. Pieces and dating

*a) Kings*

Jaques Staunton kings have varied only slightly throughout their long production and their subtle changes are not an easy guide to dating. They have one very important dating feature: the Jaques name stamp around the base of boxwood kings and under the white ivory kings (Figure 5). In the first year of production, the stamp was J.JAQUES LONDON. Then it changed to JAQUES LONDON. After about 1885, the black king was also stamped.

There are rare examples of the kings not being signed in early sets, including several retailed by Leuchars and by Pearce (see pages 29 and 30).

**Figure 5. Kings and signatures.** *Top, kings from 1849, 1855 and a pair from 1939, with insets of typical 1849 and 1855 signatures below, and the 1939 signatures below those. Bottom, stamps under ivory kings. J.JAQUES indicates 1849-1850. JAQUES after 1851. Both kings stamped after about 1885.*

*b. Knights*

Knights provide important clues to dating sets because their shapes changed greatly over the years. The original forms were inspired by the horses' heads in the Elgin Marbles, which were the rage of London in the mid 19th century. Thomas Bruce, 7th Earl of Elgin, British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from 1799 to 1803, acquired about 60% of the friezes from the Parthenon and presented them and plaster casts of other friezes from the Parthenon to the British Museum in 1816, which were first exhibited in 1832. The original news item in the Times for 9 November 1849 states the Jaques knights are "copied from the celebrated horses' heads in the Elgin marbles". As illustrated in Figure 6, they are remarkably similar. They have the manes stylised in the same way, and the same folds in the top of the necks. One difference is that the chess knights have teeth but these are absent in the Greek reliefs.

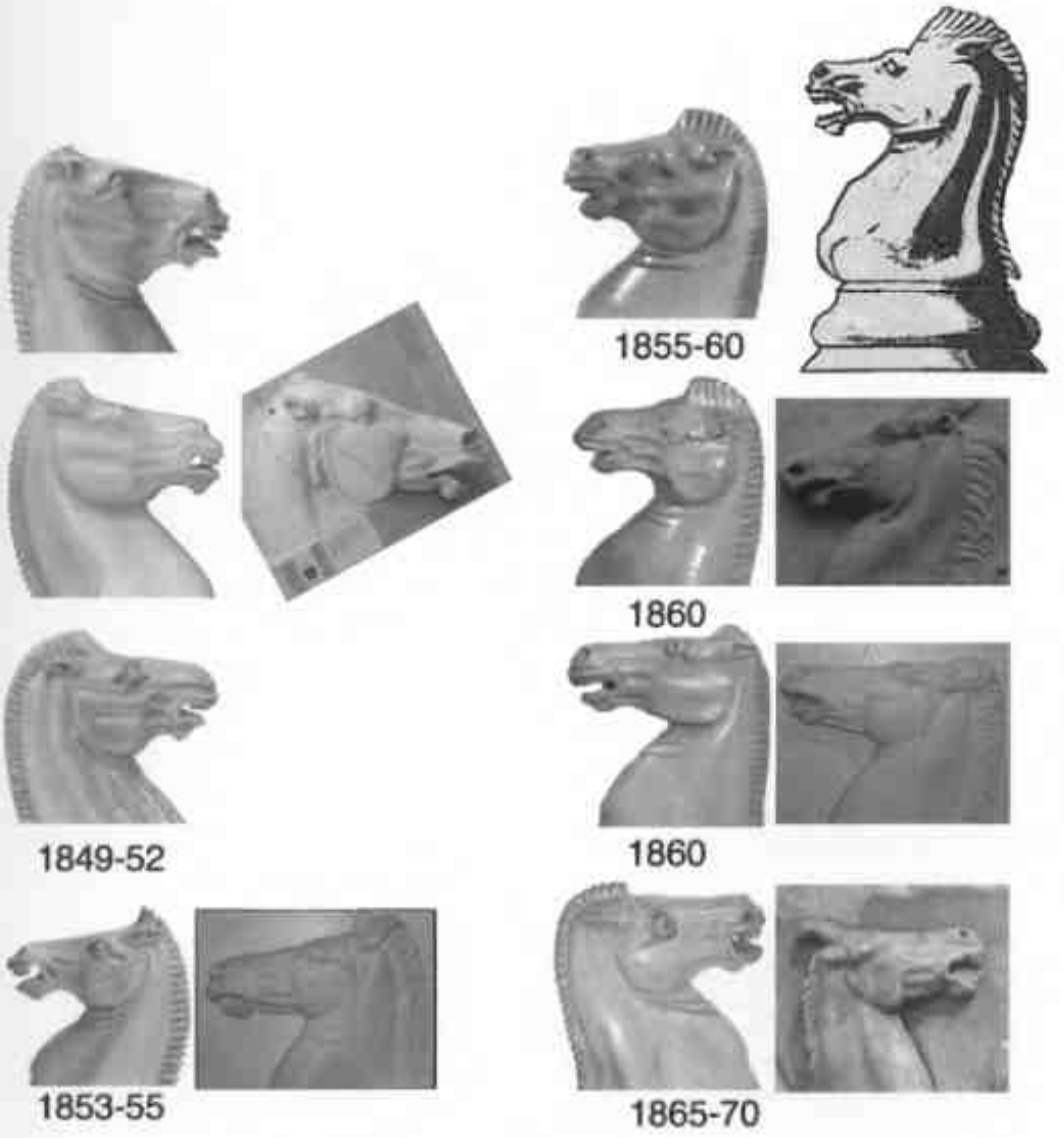



**Figure 6. Jaques knights' and Parthenon horses' heads.** *Top right, the 1849 registered design, redrawn by the author from the original in the Public Records Office. The 1849-52 knights are clearly based on the head of a horse from the chariot of Selene, the Moon Goddess. The 1853-55 knight is undoubtedly based on the standard Parthenon horse. The remaining knights resemble somewhat other horses heads. The 1855-60 knight most closely resembles Nathaniel Cook's registered design.*

The Parthenon horses have a variety of styles and features. The gape of the mouth varies, for example, the wider being indicative of exhaustion. Other faces are at different angles with different expressions, relating to their action. Some are physically different, with different shaped muzzles. The Jaques' carvers appeared to have worked their way around the Elgin galleries in the 1850s especially, introducing new styles into the Jaques' sets that superseded the earlier styles.

The first knights in 1849-1852 were clearly modelled on the head of a horse from the chariot of Selene (Figure 6), which is more jowly than those in relief on the friezes and has a distinct hollow in front of the nostrils, that is, a "dished" face, characteristic of Arab horses. There were two basic varieties in 1849-1850. One has a squatter face, more sloping and with a shorter mane (Type 1 in Figure 6). The other has its mane distinctly above the ears (Type 2). These presumably emanate from two different carvers. There is individual variation in the knights from any one set, as will be seen later. There is some evidence that the Type 1 knight is associated with slimmer pawns with more fragile collars. But, there is no correlation between the two types and the entered numbers on the labels. For example, the early set number 9 and the late set 628 have type 1 whereas intermediate numbers can be found with type 2. These early sets have kings stamped with J.JAQUES. These evolved into a more jowly version ("Morphy") knights, which are less attractive and deviate from the Greek ideal. The knight from the J.JAQUES-stamped king set following these in Figure 7 has a much squatter face, and several variants are found in JAQUES-stamped sets. The proliferation of styles may have arisen as Jaques expanded production and used more carvers, possibly outworkers. Overlapping periods of style are indicated by styles being out of step with the numbering. The club size set 3259, which has a complete set of registration stickers and was known to have been sold before June 1855, has identical knights to the 3.5" ivory set 3027, which is one of the earliest printed entry numbers and presumably dates to about 1851-52, and to the club size 3841.

A series from the early to mid 1850s for sets having printed entered numbers adopted the major Parthenon style (Figure 6 bottom left and Figure 8 bottom row, second from left). The knights have deeply curved backs and narrow, horizontal muzzles. The quality control is not good, as seen later in Figure 10, where there is considerable variation in height and in shape of face. Either individual workers were going for speed rather than quality or, as often speculated, knights from different carvers were pooled and taken at random by those assembling the sets.

From 1855 or so to the early 1860s, there are varieties with gaping mouths. It is possible that these are derived from actual examples in the Elgin Marbles and surrounding galleries in the British Museum as isolated classical heads can be found that are very similar to the Jaques' styles until about 1880 (Figure 7). After 1860, the faces are no longer dished but have rounded muzzles with a "Roman" nose. After 1880, the carving of knights became relatively uniform during different periods, with mechanization of carving. From the 1880s to the 1920s, excellent knights of very uniform quality were produced. The quality gradually degraded in the 1920s, and the immediate pre-World War II knights are relatively crude.

Groups of four knights from individual sets in Figure 10 illustrate the variability of carving, which is the hallmark and part of the charm of individually handmade sets by artisans relying on their eye rather than precise measurement. The very expensive ivory sets have very well matched knights. But there is considerable variation in even the 1849 wooden sets, where each group is carved by the same hand. Throughout the 1850s, the matching can be very poor, with the products from different carvers being jumbled together. Although mismatching can be from sellers making up sets from part ones in recent years, the variability is seen in sets that have been in the same family for generations with each piece having identical colour,

patination and felts, showing that they have been together since new and have aged and oxidised under identical conditions. The earliest black knights from about 1849-1853 had heads made from boxwood that was stained black. They have often faded to brown (Figure 7).

**Figure 7. Early 1850s knights with black stained boxwood.** *Top are 1849 "Cook" knights, with the brown showing through. Bottom are the jowly and very brown "Morphy" style. Note the individual variations in carving.*

*The Camaratta Classification*

Frank A. Camaratta Jr. has classified 17 primary variations of Jaques Staunton knights with sub-variations prior to WWII and named them after either a particularly strong player of the relevant period or by association with illustrations in books or for other reasons. The sets are named accordingly. The following summary is based on an analysis by Robert Stoller.

1 *Leuchars* (1849). Typified by a plain version of the Cook knight (Type I in Figure 8). Rare, in a few sets retailed by Leuchars.
2 *Cook* (1849-1850). Attractively carved knights by skilled craftsmen.
3 *Wedgewood* (1849). Only four known surviving pieces in carrara.
4 *Morphy* (with pronounced jowls). Reputedly a set of this type in the Louisiana Museum was once owned by Morphy.
5 *Harrwitz* (1852-55). First of the "drop jaw", but with the upper teeth articulated. Similar to the registered pattern.
6 *Paulsen* (1853-1855). Most common of the printed Entered No. sets. The closest to the Elgin Marbles horses heads.
7 *Anderssen* (1855-65). Several variations, including "Drop jaws".
8 *Steinitz* (1865-70). The first with drilled out eyes. Large mouths.
9 *Tarrasch* (1870-1875). Usually without drilled eyes.
10 *Zukertort* (1875-80). Drilled out eyes and smaller mouth
11 *Lasker* (1880-85). Knight has short face with pronounced "goatee".
12 "Pre-*Hartston*" (1885-1890).
13 *Hartston* (1890-1900). Features in "The Kings of Chess" (Harper & Row, New York, 1985) by William Hartston. Bishop has a bullet shaped mitre.

14 *Marshall* (1900-15). Similar to the Hartston, with a slightly different knight and the bishop has a more rounded mitre.
15 *Nimzovitch* (1915-125). Essentially the Marshall with a different knight.
16 *Broadbent*. (1925-37). Such a set was presented to Mr. R.J. Broadbent in 1937.
17 *Lessing* (1927-1937). Features in "The World of Chess" (Random House, New York 1974) by Antony Saidy and Norman Lessing. The same as the Broadbent, but with very crude knights.

Some typical examples are in Figures 7-10. But, there is significant variation within each of these categories that blurs the distinctions and the time frames, and also variation in individual knights in the same set, as illustrated in Figures 7 and 10. The knights that most closely follow the Cook registered design are the 1855-60 "Anderssen drop jaw" and the 1852-55 "Harrwitz". From about 1885 onwards, the knights are much more standardised and it takes a keen eye to distinguish among them.

**Figure 8. Progress of knights.** *The earliest and finest. The 1851-52 is possibly the most magnificent. The quality drops off after the Anderssen. Photo of Harrwitz courtesy of Dario Perez.*

**Figure 9. Later knights.** *After the Zukertort, there is much stricter quality control. This is accompanied by a loss of individuality in the carving and the pattern changes only slightly with time. It is not easy to distinguish between them. The Lasker has a pronounced goatee. The Hartston face is slightly dished. But, there is still some variation between sets in the 1885-1900 series. The Marshall and Nimzovich are very similar, the Marshall being slightly squatter and straighter. The Broadbent has a squarer face. The Lessing is a less well-executed Broadbent and can be of inferior quality. The Broadbent photo is courtesy of Joost van Reij.*

**Figure 10. Variability of knights in individual sets.** *After 1880, they are of high uniform quality.*

*c. Bishops*

The bishops' mitres changed significantly over the years and their shape is a good guide for dating sets. The earliest bishops (Figure 11), have the small knop at the top sliced through by a wide, almost vertical gash, and the weak tops are frequently found broken. The 1853-55 sets have very wide and

**Figure 11. Progress of bishops.** *After 1900, rounded mitres with small gashes.*

deep gashes, with a smaller cut in the knop. By 1860, the mitre becomes wider, the gash smaller, and the knop is fully round. The 1880s bishops are distinctly more rugged. Towards the end of the century, the mitre became larger and bullet shaped. The mitre became standardised in the 20th century being more round with a narrower, angled gash to give a robust playing piece.

*d. Rooks*

The main feature of rooks that changed over the years is the height of the battlements (Figure 12). The early rooks had shallow, fragile, battlements. As the century proceeded, they became deeper, but there are random deviations. The 20th century rooks do have distinctly higher and thicker battlements.

**Figure 12. Progress of rooks.**

*e. Crown stamps on king's rooks and knights*

The kings' side rooks and knights are stamped with a crown, which was a Jaques innovation that was copied by other makers. The shape of the crown did not change over the years on wooden sets. The bottom left in Figure 13 is from an 1849 3.5" set and the one on the right from a 1939 set.

**Figure 13. Crowns on boxwood king's rooks.** *Left 1849, right 1939.*

**Figure 14. Crowns on ivory king's rooks.** *Left 1855, right 1920. The usual ivory stamp, as on the left of Figure 14, is finer and has the semblance of a cross on the top, instead of a circle. The 1920 rook has a simplified crown with a well defined cross. There is an identical stamp on a very early J.Jaques 3.5" set.*

*f. Queens*

Like their consort, the queens change in only subtle ways with time. The early queens tend to have finer and more fragile coronets, which become thicker and more rugged – as can be seen later in the illustrations of individual sets – especially in the very late sets (Figures 24-27). There is considerable variation in the queens' coronets, even for sets closely linked in time (Figures 15 and 16). The coronets of the earlier sets tend to be thin, the later thicker and chamfered to the points. Individual variation in the heights of the bases is not systematic, but it makes the substitution of individual pieces more obvious. Most coronets have 10 points, but some 1849 sets have only 8, as on the left of Figure 15.

**Figure 15. Tops of queens.** *Left and middle1849-50. Right 1855.*

**Figure 16. Progress of queens.** *Left to right: 1849-50; 1849-50; 1853-55; 1925-37.*

*g. Pawns*

The very early pawns tend to be more fragile, with thinner necks attaching the top ball and with finer collars (Figure 17 and in the compilation of sets in Figures 24-27). Again, there is individual variation from turner to turner in the early sets of the same period, which makes matching up pawns from different sets obvious at close inspection. The 1849-1850 pawns in Figure 17 are typical of two different types found in the first sets, with different slopes to the collars and thicknesses of the waist. The 1855 pawn is definitely stockier, with a thicker neck and stronger collar. Later pawns have thicker and stronger collars and strong necks, to minimise their breakage and chances of decapitation .

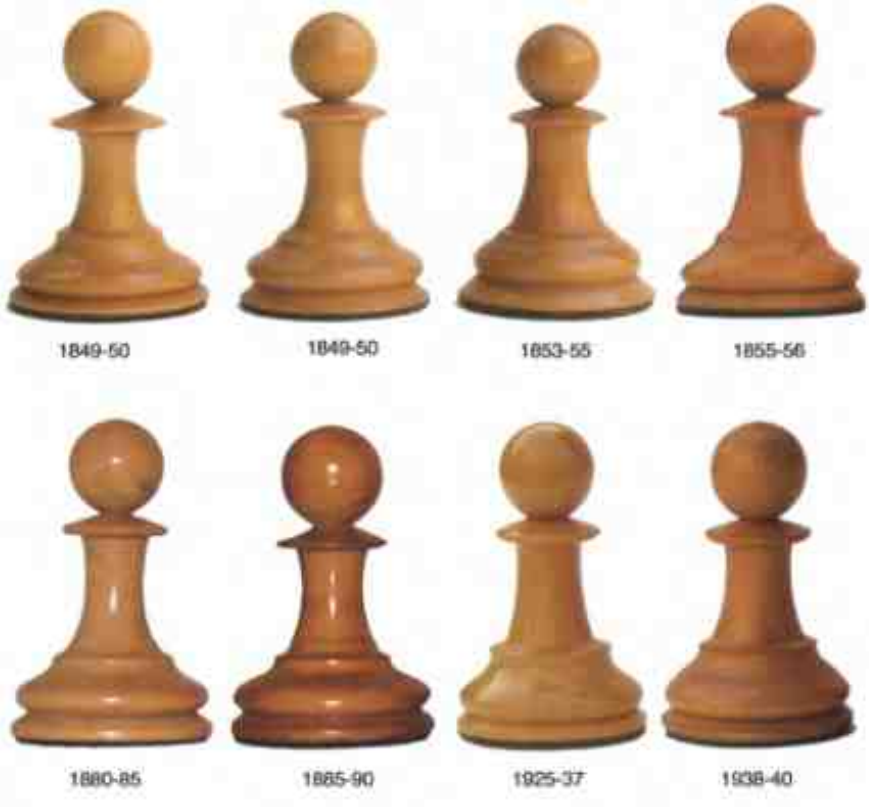



**Figure 17. Progress of pawns.**

## 4. Boxes

*Mahogany*

The first mahogany boxes were produced in 1849 for the club size sets (Figure 18). The four sides are held together by dovetailed joints. The lock catch is to the left of centre. The inside was lined with green baize. A small brass shield on the top was provided for engraving the owners initials. For the first year, the hand-signed label was under the box, where, almost without exception, they have become very worn. The label then migrated inside the top lid and is green. The smaller boxes for the 3.5" sets have simple mitred joints, with a thin reinforcing joint close to the top of each corner, and do not have a shield. Throughout the 19th century, there is just a single compartment for the pieces. During and after the first quarter of the 20th Century, the boxes have a division for the black and white pieces (Figure 19). Slide lid boxes were soon introduced for the smaller unweighted boxwood and ebony sets, with the label on top of the lid. These have simple mitred corners with top reinforcing joints. The earlier are usually lined with a red material, and with green baize in the late sets.

The club size ivory sets have a very superior casket made from Spanish mahogany (Figure 19). The pieces are housed in removable trays that are lined with cushioned deep blue velvet. The top tray has two lifting handles, which are invariably missing, and the bottom has two blue lifting tapes. The label is on the inside of the bottom, where it is well protected.

*Carton Pierre caskets*

Carton Pierre is papier mache with a high gypsum plaster content. A Mr Joseph Williams designed a Carton Pierre casket specifically to house the earliest 3.5" sets in 1849 (Figure 20). Its Gothic style has strong chess set connotations. The box remained available without change of design until 1927. It was modified to take a 2.9" set by having a false bottom inside. It was deepened by having a skirting to take the 4.4" ivory sets. The same moulds were used for the Gothic patterns for all sizes. The lining is deep blue or rich burgundy velvet. The lid was originally hinged with leather, which is totally impractical and the hinges have all ripped with use. There should be two tapes that attached the side of the lid to the box. The underside of the lid is padded and surrounded by tooled leather of various repeating designs. Between the velvet lining and the Carton Pierre is a red lining that is visible through the tracery of the patterns. It is normally made of fabric and is usually faded. In some caskets, the lining is made of a red crackled paper that matches the leather on the Leuchars board (see next). This does not fade.

The box has simple glued mitres that come apart with age and are readily visible (Figure 21). If these joints are not apparent, then there has either been substantial restoration or the box is a complete fake made of resin. Beware of these and also be suspicious of boxes with glaring red lining peeping through.

*Leather caskets*

Jaques occasionally used leather caskets, such as the sarcophagus and the "Trolley Car", illustrated at the bottom of Figure 20.

**Figure 18. Mahogany boxes.**

Figure 19. Mahogany boxes.

**Figure 20. Top, Carton Pierre caskets. Bottom, leather sarcophagus and "Trolley Car" for 3.5" ivory set.** *(Trolley car photo courtesy of Jon Crumiller).*

**Figure 21. Underside of a Carton Pierre casket.** *Note the very visible mitres under each corner as the box has dried out with time. If these joints are missing, then the casket has either been heavily restored or is a fake. Jaques London has been covered by another trade label. The king (right) is not stamped Jaques London. It is otherwise identical to the king (left) of set Entered No. 2880. Jaques sometimes made for other retailers and did not stamp the kings. The king here is undoubtedly original, being of the correct pattern and having the same patination and felts as the other pieces as well having a similar boxwood grain to that of the queen.*

## 5. Two special sets

Jaques made two ivory sets with 5.5" kings as special orders. One was made in about 1860-1865 for a Mexican general. The other, in Figure 22, may have been made in the 1850s for Staunton himself. The handsome shape is atypical as the pieces were elongated to give the height, rather than scaled up proportionally. The knights are a variation of the Anderssen.

**Figure 22. 5.5" ivory set with casket and board.** *Photo courtesy of Garrick Coleman.*

## 6. Leuchars board

William Leuchars, the retailer who sold the first Jaques sets in 1849 from his upmarket shop in Piccadilly, designed a board to match the Carton Pierre box (Figure 23). The casket sits surrounded by gothic tracery when the board is closed (see front cover). The leather hinge is usually broken from use. Black or green and white squares are also found.

**Figure 23. Leuchars board**. *Top, open board, with enlargements of lettering. Bottom, folded board, showing the gothic pattern on back, which matches the Carton Pierre casket. The casket can sit on the board, as illustrated on the front cover.*

## 7. Sets

The Victorians divided production into specialist areas. By analogy with other trades, there would have been specialist carvers of knights, specialist turners - possibly even specialising in individual pieces, varnishers, felters and sorters into sets in boxes. Looking at the variability in the carving of knights, the products of different carvers would have been pooled. Although one may characterise sets by the Camaratta classification, in practice, individual sets can have features that belong to other categories or have perfectly correct pieces that differ from the standard classification. As there is so much human involvement in the construction of pieces, there is a spread of styles because of normal deviations expected from statistics. Combining these variations with sets being made up from pooled products from different artisans, there is a near continuum of styles of individual pieces and their association with others. Any classification is bound to be only an approximate guide because the division of a continuum into separate classes has to be arbitrary. But, the Camaratta classification is a useful guide and a catchy nomenclature.

*Examples of sets.*
The first two boxwood sets 1849-50 and 1850 in Figure 24 have the white kings stamped J.Jaques, and have green registration lozenges under several pieces. Note the knights are larger than the rooks and the characteristic early bishops have deep gashes in their mitres. The knights are the two types of "Cook". The 1850-1852 ivory set 3259 has all its registration stickers and a more refined knight than the earlier ones, possibly the most beautiful ever made by Jaques. The knight is relatively smaller. The 1850-51 J.Jaques-stamped set in Figure 25 has the jowly "Morphy" knight. The 1852-55 "Harrwitz" has registration lozenges under some pieces, suggesting the early dating.

The 1853-55 boxwood and ebony No. 2880 in Figure 25 has the "Paulsen" knight, which is small, and the very characteristic bishop of the period. The equivalent ivory set 3485, below, has knights of higher quality of carving. The 4.4" "Anderssen" is a handsome set with its aggressive knights and wide-mitred bishops. Note that the 4.4" sets are stockier than the 3.5" and 2.9" sets. The next two sets at the bottom of Figure 25 have "Anderssen drop jaw" knights and are relatively crude. The patina of these early sets is very fine, resulting from a thin coating of shellac.

From 1865-1900 in Figure 26, the bishops become noticeably top heavy with larger mitres. The knights have drilled eyes and have Roman noses. The superb 4.4" ivory set in the middle of Figure 26 is an example of the "Zukertort" style. The pawns have fine collars. The knight is not as impressive as its classical counterpart in 3259 in the middle of Figure 24 of 30 years before, which was modelled on the Elgin Marbles.

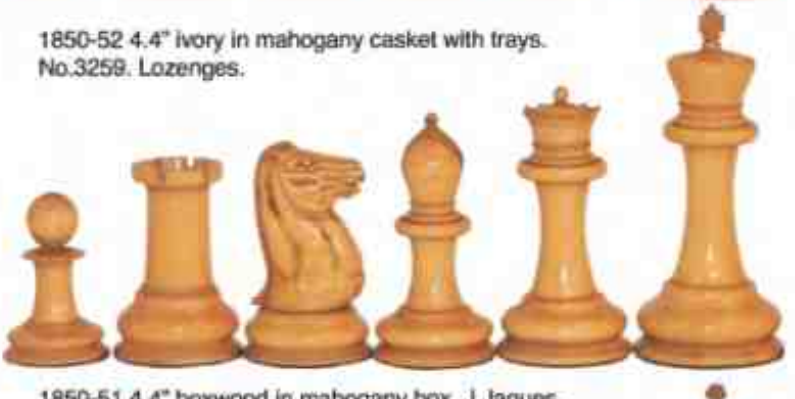
The first four sets in Figure 27 are of very high quality as well. The ivory set is at least as good as its 1853-55 counterpart. By 1938, however, although the standard of the turning is as high as ever, the "Lessing" knights are very crude. The sets from about 1890 are finished with a varnish rather than shellac. The varnish does not wear as well as shellac, which penetrates well into the wood and ages beautifully.

The illustrations of the 1855-60 "Anderssen drop jaw", the 1870-75 "Tarrasch", the 1875-1880 "Zukertort", and the 1890-1900 "Hartston" sets were assembled from photographs of pieces in Bonhams catalogues (with permission). The 1900-1915 "Marshall" was adapted from a photo by Tim Millard. The 1925-37 "Broadbent" was kindly photographed by Joost van Reij, as was the 1852-55 "Harrwitz" by Dario Perez.

1849-50 4.4" boxwood in mahogany box. J.Jaques. Lozenges.

1850 3.5" boxwood in mahogany box. No. 628. J.Jaques. Lozenges.

1850-52 4.4" ivory in mahogany casket with trays. No.3259. Lozenges.



1850-51 4.4" boxwood in mahogany box. J.Jaques.

1852-55 2.9" boxwood. Jaques. Lozenges.

**Figure 24. Very early sets**

1853-55 3.5" boxwood in Carton Pierre casket.

1853-55 3.5" ivory in Carton Pierre casket.
No. 3485.

1855-56 4.4" boxwood in mahogany box
No.1729.

1855-60 3.5" boxwood in Carton Pierre casket.

1860-65 3.5" boxwood in mahogany box

**Figure 25. Early sets in the Jaques London period.**

1865-70 3.5" boxwood in mahogany box.

1870-75 4" boxwood in mahogany box.

1875-80 4.4" ivory in mahogany casket with trays.

1880-1885 3.5" boxwood in slide lid box.
Jaques and Son London.

1885-90 4.4" boxwood in mahogany box. Both kings stamped.

**Figure 26. Sets in the Jaques and Son period.**

1890-1900 3.5" boxwood in mahogany box.
Jaques and Son London.

1900-1915 3.5" boxwood in mahogany box.
Jaques and Son Ltd London.

1915-25 3.5" ivory in red sarcophagus.
Jaques and Son Ltd London

1925-1937 3.5" boxwood in mahogany box.
Jaques and Son Ltd London.

1938-40 3.5" boxwood in slide lid box
Jaques and Son Ltd London.

**Figure 27. The "Hartston" at the top and then 1900-1939 sets with Jaques and Son Ltd London labels.** *Both kings are stamped.*

## 8. Collecting

There are Jaques sets in every price range from £50-£20,000+ and so there are opportunities for all collectors. Some collectors like to buy every set they see. Others like to collect choice examples of each period. There are those whose tastes are so refined that they will consider only the most rare and perfect of examples. There is a general rule in antiques collecting that is better to buy the best of a particular price range than the worst of a higher at the same price because good examples are readily cherished and can always be sold on or part exchanged, whereas a poor example is always a poor example. For playing, the sets from the 1880s to 1930s are excellent for general daily play because they are both handsome and rugged. The 3.5" sets are of official present tournament size. The larger club size has the full gravitas of a Jaques set. The earlier sets are just as good for play, but they are more delicate and prone to break on dropping. So, have a carpet with thick pile under your chess table, and discourage your opponent from throwing pieces into the box.

Ideally, a Jaques set should be in the right box with the right label. Carton Pierre caskets are very fragile and many have been destroyed over the years and the sets put in the nearest box, married to the box of a different make or to a Jaques box of the wrong period or with the wrong label. This will halve the value of a decent playing, but not rare, set and more so for an early set. The earliest sets with numbered labels are more desirable, and those with hand-signed even more so. Early features, such as a J.Jaques signature or green Victorian registration lozenges are also very desirable, and often not expensive in the absence of a box. These lovely early sets can be obtained for the price of a later boxed set. If these early sets are in the right mahogany box or Carton Pierre casket, the price rockets as wealthy collectors will compete for them. Empty Carton Pierre caskets are valuable, costing somewhat more than an early set without a box. A printed entered number set in a Carton Pierre box is very desirable. A general rule is that the bigger the set, the better. The 3.5" tournament size sets are worth far more than the smaller library sets, and the club size at least a factor of two more than the tournament.

The most desirable set is the club size ivory in a mahogany box with trays for the individual pieces. These sets were top of the range a century and a half ago and remain the same today because of their extreme rarity and beauty, which is complemented and protected by the Spanish mahogany case. An early such set in excellent condition with a numbered label and registration stickers will sell for a very high price. Next is the club size ivory in a Carton Pierre casket. The weights of the set and individual pieces are likely to have caused damage to the pieces and the casket, which is another factor making them less desirable than the mahogany cased versions. These are followed by the 3.5" ivory sets, which are in Carton Pierre or other caskets. After these, are the club size ebony and boxwood in mahogany caskets, where the earlier the better, and a good box and label will greatly enhance the price. Similar reasoning applies to the 3.5" boxwood and ebony sets.

Condition is all-important. Perfection carries a huge premium, which increases with rarity. Minor restoration, such as repairs to collars of pawns and tops of bishops are acceptable. Obvious replacement of pieces is a severe drawback. It is, accordingly, important to check carefully any prospective set prior to purchase and not to rely on vague descriptions and poor photographs. Assume that sets are "wrong" until satisfied otherwise.

## 9. Checklist

1. *Uniformity of pieces.*
The shapes of turned pieces were guided by metal profiles and so all turned pieces should be close to identical, especially the pawns. You can expect variation where hand carving or cutting comes in: e.g., in early knights (which are very variable in the 1850-60s – see Figure 10); in the precise cut of the mitre on early bishops; and the form of the crosses of early kings (which are also frequently replaced). There is some variation in the collar rings of early kings and queens. As discussed above, there are variations in different productions of early sets and it is difficult to find perfect matches for replacing pieces. So, each piece must be carefully inspected. Good photos can often help in comparisons, especially of the pawns lined up.

2. *Uniformity of patination.* Colour and patination are probably the best clues for detecting substituted pieces. All pieces should have the same colour and patination, except the knights, which were separately varnished. Any pieces of different shades of colour are almost certainly replacements The author has three 1855 sets, each of which has its distinct shade of colour for the boxwood pieces and switching them can be readily discerned when forewarned. An ultra-violet lamp is very useful for detecting touching up or later varnishes.

3. *Felts.*
Ideally all felts should be the same colour and with the same wear. Felts do get replaced, however, and I have also seen later sets that are undoubtedly correct with mixed felts, probably from the time they were assembled.

4. *Weights*
Peel back the felts to see if all the weights are identical. Weigh the pieces.

5. *Boxes*
Jaques wooden boxes changed little in design over the years. Check the design is right and the label is of the right period. Later unweighted sets tend to come in slide lid boxes. Although, wooden sets in Carton Pierre cased sets were generally unweighted, the customers had the choice of having their smaller wooden sets loaded with lead at additional cost in the same Carton Pierre caskets.

Carton Pierre caskets are rather fragile. Most have broken battlements and many have been totally destroyed. Some have been extensively restored with resin. There are also fake boxes made of resin. Check that you can see the joins from the 45 degrees four mitres at each corner top and bottom where the wooden sides have been joined. Resin sets will not have the mitres and extensive repairs using filler will cover them. The boxes for the smallest sets have the same external dimensions as for the 3.5" sets but have a raised interior false bottom.

*6. Stamping of Kings*
Until 1885-90, only the white king should be stamped. During and after that time, both kings should be stamped. There are rare exceptions. The author has an 1855 set that has been in the same family for generations. Its king has identical colour to the rest of the pieces and identical aged felts, and is identical to the black king and kings from other 1855 sets in form (Figure 23). Yet, it is not stamped. This could have been an oversight from Jaques. More likely, however, it was deliberately not stamped because a retailer, Pearce, had his own trade label stuck over the Jaques name. Leuchars also removed Jaques names from kings, including Entered Nos 77 and 95 (Michael Mark, *personal communication*). It is likely that many of these sets sold by retailers did not have the Jaques stamps, but these sets have been "improved" by dealers and collectors swapping an unstamped king

from a good set in a good box with a stamped king from a similar part set. Such "improvements" are common in other areas of collecting and the practice should be avoided.

*7. Likely damage and restoration*
The weak points are the knights' ears, the knops and tops of bishops, the collars of pawns, the coronets of queens, decapitation of pawns and splits in ebony bases on shrinking around the lead weighting or on its expansion. A good restorer can skilfully repair the bishops, pawns and knights. The queens' coronets are problematic.

**Dating Checks**

*Kings stamping*:
- White king only: J.JAQUES = 1849-1850.
- White king only: JAQUES = 1850-1885.
- Both kings stamped ~1885 onwards.

*Labels:*
- Hand signed 1849-1850;
- Printed Entered Nos., 1850-1856 for boxwood and ebony, 1850 to later for ivory.
- "Jaques London", 1850-1860.
- "Jaques & Son", 1860-1862.
- "Two Prize Medals 1862" after 1862.
- "CHESSMEN" and change of border after about 1880.
- "Jaques & Son Ltd", after 1900.
- "Genuine" added in the 1930s.
- "Original" in 1940s.

*Boxes:*
- Carton Pierre, 1849-1927.
- Mahogany with single compartment, 1849 to about 1910.
- Split compartments after about 1910.

*Knights and Bishops:*
- See Figures 7-11.

**Further reading**

*British Chess Sets* (A catalogue of British Playing Sets 1700-1950 Exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum 12-24 May 1986) Michael Mark (1986).

*British Chess Sets* (2nd Edition) Michael Mark (1996). Chess Collectors International.

**Websites**

- http://www.chessantique.com - Frank Camaratta's authoritative site.
- http://www.antiquechessshop.com - Tim Millard's many excellent photos.
- http://www.antiquechess.co.uk/index2.htm - Garrick Coleman's fine sets.
- http://www.geocities.com/dermot_rochford - Dermot Rochford's essays and sets.
- http://www.eldrbarry.net/hatr/chess/unusual.htm - Eldrbarry's site with many links.
- http://www.chessantiques.com - Jon Crumiller's magnificent collection.
- http://picasaweb.google.com/chessspy - top restorer Alan Dewey's site.

*Groups*
- http://groups.ebay.com/forum.jspa?forumID=1500010850 - the eBay group.
- http://www.chesscollectors.com/ - CCI, Chess Collectors International. The major collectors' group, which hosts many activities.

***Front cover:*** Carton Pierre casket sitting on its accompanying Leuchars' board, circa 1849-50; and club size ivory pieces in tray, circa 1850-52.

***Rear cover*** in descending order: club size ivory pieces circa 1850-52; tournament size pieces circa 1853-55; and 1920.

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